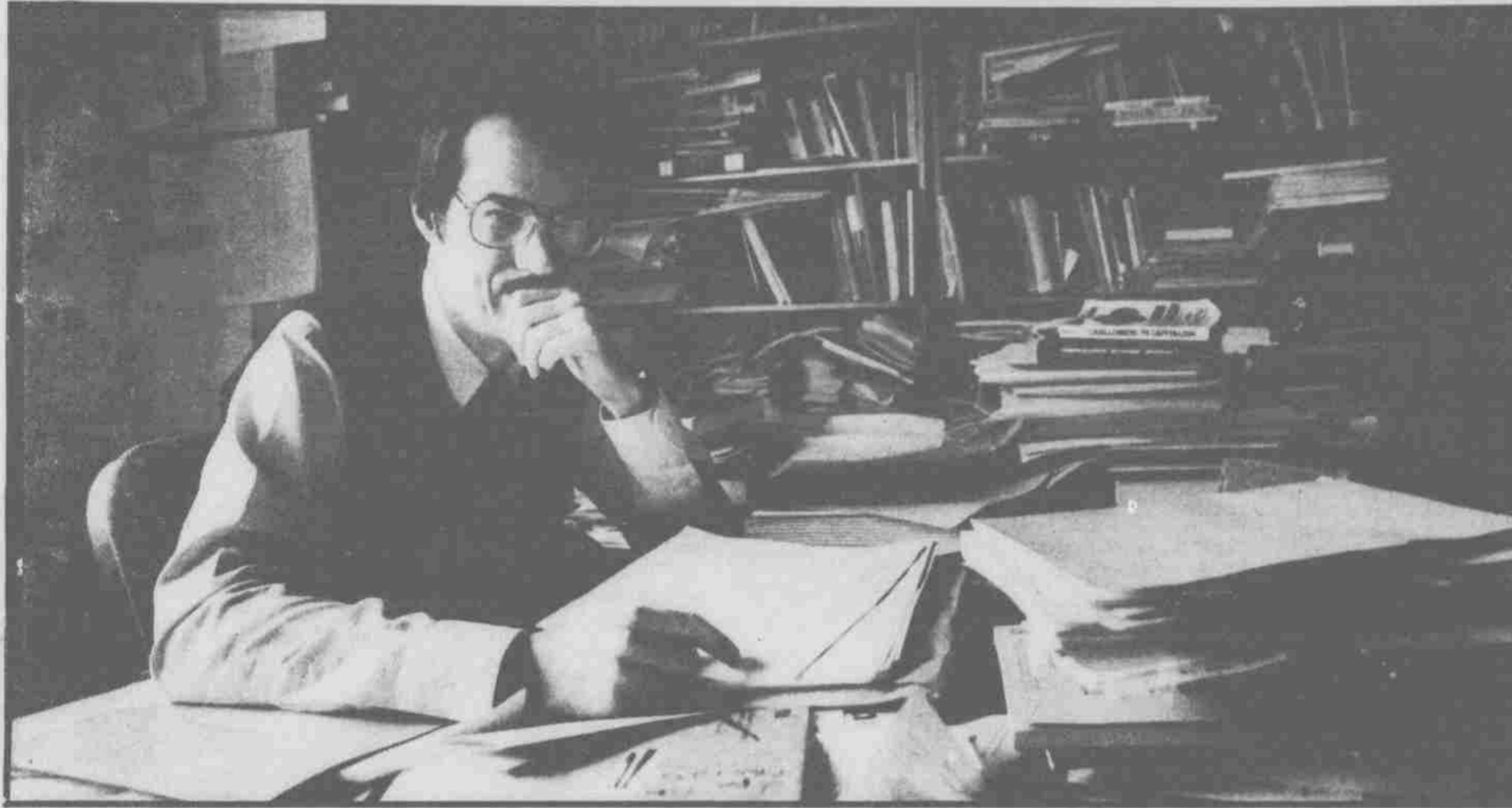


Centennial College



Dan Dulaney/Sower

She said some faculty members wanted to be relieved of grade judgment.

"It was a rebellion against the system of grades, but that's giving a mixed signal to kids," she said.

By the late 1970s, Centennial's grading system became more responsible, Carpenter said.

Much of the disregard for grades and other traditional educational adventures resulted from disillusionment with the government's role in Vietnam, Knoll said.

Students who were disillusioned with education and enrolled in Centennial, also tended to be disillusioned with government. Centennial inherently became the haven for activists, he said.

Donaldson said he was doing public opinion polls for a Centennial project when Cambodia was invaded.

"Of course I had a black arm band. Didn't everyone? I had a black jacket with the peace sign on it. I did these things."

Then, four students were killed at Kent State University during resulting protests. Donaldson quit the polling project and funneled his energies into protests against the Vietnam War. He and other local activists created a free university over night. Seminars and teach-ins were set up the day after the invasion, and many students skipped classes to learn more about and protest against U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

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Donaldson also joined the Young Republicans, but for subversive reasons. He said he and his friends could have bought the organization for \$50 in membership fees but never got around to it.

Nebraska was tame compared with the rest of the country. There was a sit-in at the Military and Naval Science Building and a rally-hearing with two legislators on the steps of the state capitol, but other schools saw much more trouble.

"Don't get the idea that this was Berkeley," Donaldson said.

He called former President Richard Nixon's visit to the campus during the uprisings "an embarrassment." There were few U.S. schools where Nixon could have spoken during the Vietnam War.

Knoll said Centennial was the safety valve at the university for the tensions caused by student disillusionment. But the college didn't keep them from being upset about the issues.

"The nation was in the process of having a revolution," Knoll said. The government was requiring young men to die without giving much evidence that it would do any good or that the cause was just. Fathers lost faith in their sons. Sons lost faith in their parents. Citizens lost faith in their institutions. And the university was one of those institutions.

"We were the safety valve," he said. "There was one place on campus that was anti-establishment."

Homze said the war was not the only issue. A fight for civil rights that began in the '60s continued. Students also were concerned about the environment.

Many of the student activists were enrolled in Centennial so it received credit for much of the campus turmoil, Homze said.

Socrates called himself the gadfly that stung people on the butts, he said.

"That's the way Centennial was supposed to be."

After a while, students involved in Centennial began to form rallies for other causes. Donaldson said a "parody demonstration" was held in front of the Nebraska Union because money for an addition to Love Library was cut from the budget. A mock library was built, complete with everything but books. Posters advertised the lending policy: "No fees, no fines, no books."

The activism in the early years and reports that Centennial was academically lax in the later years prompted some support for the closing of the college in 1981. There were indications, too, that Centennial College was not as alive as it once had been.

The attitude of university students began to change. Students were afraid to commit themselves to a program such as Centennial.

The "me" generation of the late 1970s was less inclined to live in residence halls, Carpenter said. Their lifestyles became more private and they felt less need for a community by the late 1970s.

Up to this point, the community had been one of Centennial's greatest assets. Most former student and fellows cited it as the most positive part of the program. Centennial became more like the rest of the university in response to changing attitudes.

Jerry Petr, UNL associate economics professor and former Centennial College fellow.

Petr said students could register for courses like they would for a history class. In addition, all courses followed a basic theme so a common thread would unite the projects.

Despite the changes, Centennial College was discontinued following the Fall semester of 1981. Ned Hedges, then the acting vice chancellor, said the College of Arts and Sciences had been asked to reduce or eliminate programs for reallocation purposes.

There were some critics who spoke of Centennial as a "hippy haven," but Hedges said he has never seen Centennial as a failure. He said there are two reasons Centennial was discontinued: Centennial fellows held positions in other parts of the university so eliminating their positions would not leave them jobless, and many liberal factors of the Centennial program were absorbed by traditional education. The university added independent study, special topics and mini-courses to curriculum.

Dropping Centennial College on the Lincoln campus and the general engineering program at UNL freed about \$155,000 that could be given to other programs, Hedges said.

But a funny thing happened to the money saved. A few days later the legislature appropriations committee submitted a budget that reduced the money for the university by an equal amount.

"We lost the programs, but we also lost the money," Hedges said. "We felt somewhat betrayed."

Petr said he was sorry to see Centennial College go. It was like losing a friend. If there's anything that makes him feel bitter about the discontinuance, it's the waste of the small amount of money used to run the program.

"Centennial lost its life for nothing," he said.

THE SOWER

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